



## Hello Friends!

We trust you are all enjoying this sunny (nearly summery!) weather.

October was another very busy month for us at the Danbury Museum. In addition to tours and our daily museum duties, we had multiple programs, facilitated numerous groups using our Huntington Hall space, and were able to share Charles Ives's big 149th birthday with so many of you on social media.

On Saturday, October 28, from 1-2:30 we are pleased to welcome Rebecca Dimyan to read from her new book, *Waiting for Beirut*. Rebecca is a local author and she'll also be talking about her writing process. Books will be available to purchase at the event. More details on our [website](#).

On Saturday, November 11, from 2-3 we are happy to welcome another local author, John Gillen, to speak of his experiences in Vietnam and to talk about his book, *Whispers of Truth Amidst Roars of the Insane*. Books will be available to purchase at this event.

Both author events are FREE and open to the public!

The rest of 2023 looks to be equally as busy, so be sure to check our [Upcoming Events](#) page and our social media platforms to keep up to date. We have more author talks ahead, pop-up shops in Huntington Hall in December, and some really fun surprises on our website and more! Stay tuned.

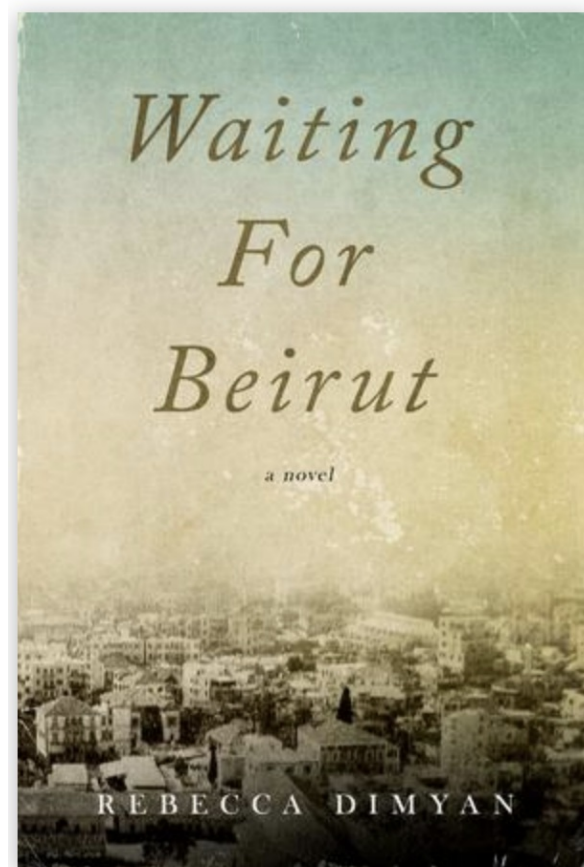
We're pleased to have John O'Donnell with us again this month. He writes a poignant essay that skillfully weaves together the story of a Danbury WWI soldier with Rudyard Kipling's WWI work on the Imperial War Graves Commission. And we share a different side of well-known and respected Danbury hat manufacturer, William Beckerle this month, as we look at his Hill Top Stock Farm and its prized stable of regally bred trotting horses.

We'll look forward to seeing you back here at the end of November with a full slate of holiday goodies! Thank you again for your continued support and we wish you and yours a most joyous Thanksgiving.

Brigid Guertin

Patrick Wells

Michele Lee Amundsen

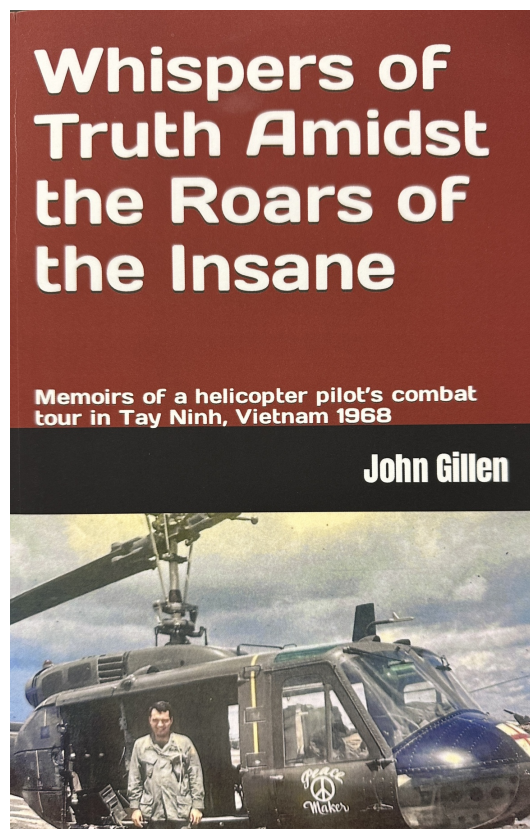


Join us on Saturday, October 28, from 1-2:30. Rebecca will speak about her writing

process and read from the book. This event is FREE and all are welcome, books will be available for purchase.

"Set in early 1950s Danbury, CT, and Lebanon, *Waiting for Beirut* is an account of the suffering of a man who is not allowed to follow his heart and the wreckage caused by broken dreams. A portrait of the Lebanese-American community, immigrant assimilation experience over generations, and evocative food culture, this story also explores the tragic tension of a great love that society cannot allow. Inspired by the life of Dimyan's grandfather, this award-winning debut novel is a compilation of a decade of research which included extensive interviews, oral histories, and travel to Lebanon."

Rebecca Dimyan is a local author, editor, and teacher.



On Saturday, November 11, at 2pm, veteran John Gillen joins us to talk about his book, *Whispers of Truth Amidst Roars of the Insane*. John is a local author and books will be available for purchase at the event.

"I kept a logbook during my tour in 'Nam as a helicopter pilot where I recorded my daily missions (combat and otherwise). These entries were the basis for letters and audiotapes sent home. My daughter suggested many times over the past 25 years to write a book about my wartime experiences. So now I've decided to turn my log into a book to illustrate the insanity and horrors of war and how the enemy, the jungle, the

poorly maintained helicopters, and the Army's bureaucracy tried but fortunately failed to kill me.

I describe what a warrior feels every second he's in a bloody battle where his brothers-in-arms lay all around in pieces or in flames."



*Commemorative stone for George W Standish within the Ives family plot at Wooster Cemetery.*

## **A World War One Danbury Hero**

By John O'Donnell

As we approach the Veterans Day holiday, I think it is fitting to look at the short but impactful life of a sometime Danbury resident who was related to a famous Danburian, Charles Edward Ives. We will look at the military career of George Winthrop Standish who heroically served in the First World War.

George Winthrop Standish was born on June 6, 1896, in Danbury but he also lived part of his life in Springville, New York. His parents were Dr. George Geer Standish

and Harriet Miner Standish. Records are rather sketchy on his early life, but he does appear in the 1900 and 1910 Federal Censuses. In 1900 he is living in Concord, New York, with his parents and three other siblings. In the 1910 Census he is living in Danbury as a boarder with the Ives family. The reason for this change was the death of both of his parents in 1902. He was sent to live with an Aunt, Anna Miner Ives (1857-1942), who was part of the Ives clan. This was a common practice at the time for relatives to take in children who had been orphaned. He was fourteen years old in 1910 and his occupation is listed as a newsboy with a paper route.

The United States did not enter World War One until April 6, 1917. George Winthrop Standish was quick to answer the call of his country. He enlisted on July 19, 1917, in the Tenth Infantry New York National Guard. He was subsequently transferred to Company H Tenth Infantry on December 7, 1917, with the rank of Private. Prior to entering military service, he had been employed as a machinist in the Remington Arms Company in Bridgeport. He departed for overseas service on May 10, 1918.

Private Standish was killed in action on September 29, 1918, in a battle for the Hindenburg Line in Picardie, France. He was cited for great gallantry and determination in action.

His sister, Mrs. Helen Hopper, was notified of his death. His burial was listed as being in the Somme American Cemetery and Memorial. But the plot was listed as the Tablets of the Missing. His body had not been found. One can only imagine the catastrophic impact this news had on one's family. It would be extremely difficult to find closure for your grief with the body of your loved one missing. This would prove an enormous complication for the family. As I said above, the story of Private Standish is somewhat scanty but if we look at the story of a remarkably similar case, I think we may be able to gauge how much of a challenge this was for his family.

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) was an English novelist, short-story writer, poet, and journalist. He was among the most preeminent writers in the United Kingdom and had an international reputation. He was a huge supporter of World War One. He was extremely anti-German and was the first to use the word Hun an anti-German insult. He also created propaganda for the British government. Kipling's only son, John, was rejected by the Royal Navy due to poor eyesight. He was also initially rejected by the army for the same reason. But his father was friends with Earl Roberts, a former Commander-in-Chief of the British Army and Colonel of the Irish Guards. Through his father's influence, John Kipling was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Second Battalion, Irish Guards on August 15, 1914, two days before his seventeenth birthday. Rudyard Kipling became even more enraged by the German invasion of Belgium and the sinking of the Lusitania. He came to see the war as a crusade against barbarism. He was eager for his son to see active service.

John Kipling was sent to France and arrived on his eighteenth birthday, August 17, 1915. Six weeks later he saw his first action in the Battle of Loos. The death toll at

Loos was greater than in any other prior engagement of the war which was already notorious for extreme numbers of casualties. John Kipling was killed in action on September 27, 1915, at the age of eighteen. He was last seen attacking a German position, possibly with a head injury. His body was not recovered. The death dates of Private Standish, September 29, 1918, and Lieutenant Kipling, September 27, 1915 are remarkably similar. Their families faced the challenge of being able to mourn and seek closure without knowing the whereabouts of their beloved sons. We do not know how the Standish family coped with their grief. But because of the notoriety of Kipling we have a much greater insight into how they dealt with this grievous blow.

Rudyard Kipling and his wife Caroline mounted a mammoth effort to try to find their son. Their efforts lasted four years. They searched for him in field hospitals, created fliers which were dropped over German lines seeking information about him. They asked the Royal Families of Holland and Sweden to intervene on their behalf with the Germans to find out if John was a prisoner of war. They interviewed John's comrades-in-arms to find out the circumstances of his death. Unfortunately, their efforts were not successful. But Rudyard Kipling did not give up. He sublimated his grief in two major efforts which helped him grieve as best he could for his only son.

In 1917 Kipling was appointed to the Imperial War Graves Commission as its literary advisor. Every word the Commission used was written, chosen, or approved by him, including the dignified inscription on the headstone of the unidentified dead, "A Soldier of the Great War, Known unto God." Kipling also worked with Winston Churchill to ensure that all gravestones were the same size regardless of rank. In 1917 he also embarked on the writing the *History of the Irish Guards in the Great War*. He used his great talents as a writer, and as a tribute to his son as well, to craft a magnificent history. John Buchan, another talented author who wrote *The Thirty-Nine Steps* wrote about Kipling's history: "It seems likely to endure as the fullest document of the war life of a British Regiment completed by a man of genius." For all their money, fame, and connections, the Kipling's were just another of the 415,325 British and Irish families whose sons were killed in action and never recovered. Their families were left bereft.

There is a memorial to John Kipling in Saint Bartholomew's Church in Sussex. It includes some lines of poetry from Henry Newbolt's poem, Clifton Chapel: "He died far away and before his time, but as a soldier and for his country." They surely apply to John Kipling and to George Winthrop Standish.

**John O'Donnell first became a history devotee while in elementary school. He was raised in Brooklyn and frequently went to Prospect Park which has a Revolutionary War monument. He was hooked!**

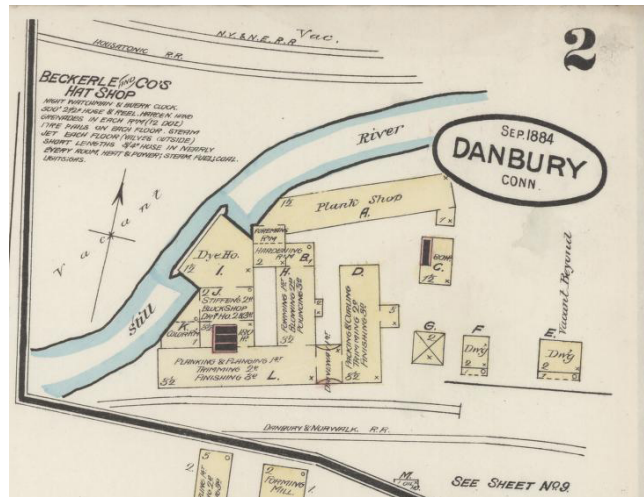


*Rudyard Kipling at the National Portrait Gallery (UK)  
by Sir Philip Burne-Jones, 1899.*



*Memorial for John Kipling, St Batholomew's  
Church, Burwash, in Sussex.*

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W Beckerle & Co factory, 1884 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map.



The Beckerle family plot at Wooster Cemetery.

## William Beckerle & Hill Top Stock Farm

By Michele Lee Amundsen  
Collections Manager

"Harness horses, the great animals that cover the mile for 'best two out of three' or 'best three in five' heats, have been bred in Danbury since 1792. Two-year-olds trotted in the little oval of 'Danbury Pleasure Park,' and names like Quartermaster, Blue Bells, Quarterstretch, Sable-nut, Villiers, and Onwardo will long be remembered in the city." (*The WPA Guide to Connecticut: The Constitution State*, 1938.)

During our recent exploration of Danbury cemeteries in #31DaysOfGraves, we shared a little history of Danbury's well-known hat manufacturer, William Beckerle, and the splendid white bronze monument in the family's plot. We thought it might be fun to explore, in a little more depth, Beckerle's other going concern, the well-bred trotting horses of his Hill Top Stock Farm. (Hill Top Stock Farm was located on



Clapboard Ridge Road, where Danbury High School is located. East Gate Road was actually the east gate of the farm.)

In 1866, William Beckerle, a young German farmer, immigrated to the United States. As his 1927 obituary notes, he rose, within the span of a decade, from a “humble immigrant working as a farmhand, to the position of one of the leading hat manufacturers of Danbury, and of the entire country.”

When Beckerle arrived in Danbury, he secured work at the farm of Lewis Elwell on Clapboard Ridge. He worked there for three or so years before entering the employ of the Tweedy Hat Manufacturing Company, then the largest hat factory in Danbury. After leaving the Tweedy factory to start his own, W Beckerle & Co., his success was swift. However, a fire in 1879 was a huge set back, and it was followed by another disastrous blaze in June of 1885, one that destroyed the company’s main factory located on East Liberty Street.

During the height of his success in the hatting industry, William Beckerle had bought the Elwell farm where he had once been a farmhand, turning it into “a handsome summit of the Hill” where he “constructed extensive stables and hay barns along the Clapboard Ridge Road.” Hill Top would, in the wake of the fire, occupy much of Beckerle’s time.

An 1894 stock Hill Top Stock Farm catalog in the museum’s collection notes that the farm was “situated in the town of Danbury, Conn., about one and a half miles from the railroad station, on the Clapboard Ridge Road, and embraces 300 acres, on the highest point of the road, and commands a beautiful view of the country for miles around.” The catalog goes on to mention that while Hill Top was comparatively new, in a scant five years the farm had acquired some of the best blooded stock—both in stallions and brood mares—as can be found at any farm in the country.

And the horses themselves? Among the best trotting bloodlines in the country, purchased from Kentucky and shipped up via railcars. Foundation sires like Hambletonian 10 (for whom the big race for three-year-old trotters is named) and Mambrino Chief show up in the impressive pedigrees of Hill Top Stock Farm. Joining the ranks of important Standardbred breeders was no doubt another mark of how far William Beckerle had advanced in 19th century Danbury society.

Danbury, thanks in part to the famous (even then) Danbury Fair, was a major stop on the New England fair circuit. There were racetracks for trotters all over Connecticut and New England and the competition was fierce, as Danbury was the culmination of the racing season in New England.

And few rivalries matched up to that of Beckerle’s Hill Top Farm and Samuel H Rundle’s Ridgewood Stock Farm. Barely more than a stone’s throw apart, (Danbury High School and Ridgewood Country Club, respectively, today) these two farms, and

the men at their respective helms, could hardly have been more different. Rundle being considered the old guard money, and Beckerle an immigrant who had worked hard and risen quickly.

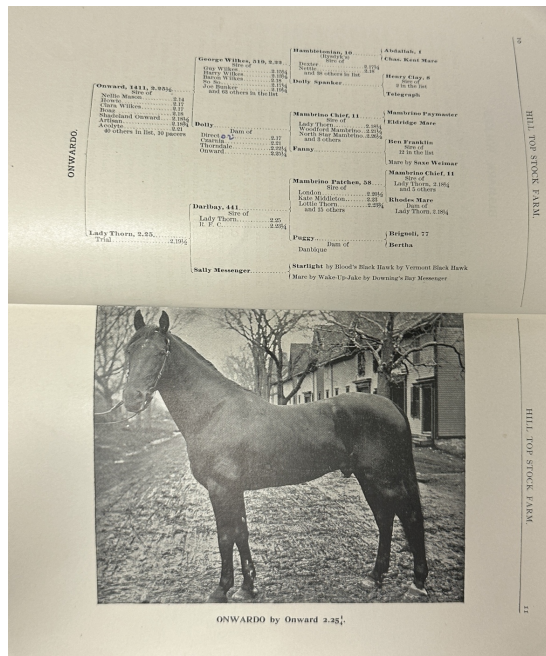
Gladys Stetson Leahy sets up their sometimes bitter competitions beautifully in *The Life and Times of the Great Danbury State Fair*. The newspapers covered all the races. Heat after heat at the Fair for many years, it was Quartermaster (a Ridgewood stallion) over Onwardo, or Onwardo (the Hill Top stallion) beating Quartermaster. The grandstand was filled with partisans cheering on their horses. As Mrs. Leahy wrote, “the two newspapers did their best to chronicle the warfare impartially and their circulation rose as horsemen and hatters, who couldn’t tell a trotter from a pacer, displayed equal interest in the particulars of each day’s skirmish.”

Sadly, despite his most impressive bloodstock, Hill Top Stock Farm was not the great success for Beckerle that hatting had been. His extensive stables and barns were destroyed by fire in November 1909 and he never fully recovered financially. William Beckerle died in 1927 and is buried in Wooster Cemetery in Danbury.

Thanks to generous members of the Beckerle family, the John H Stetson family, and more, we have rich resources that cover the Beckerle hatting concerns, the Great Danbury State Fair, and even some horse history of our area. Looking to learn more? **Research appointments are free and available to book** Wednesday through Saturday.



1894 stock catalog in the collection of the Danbury Museum.



*Pedigree page and photo of Onwardo, an important Hill Top Farm stallion.*

2024 Danbury Museum Gala

**Back in Black (Tie)!**

February 2, 2024  
The Amber Room Colonnade

The easiest way to support the mission of the Danbury Museum is to join us as a Sustaining Member. A Sustaining Membership is an unrestricted monthly gift that you can pay in a convenient, ongoing way. Each month, we will charge your credit or debit card the amount you specify. Your Sustaining Membership will automatically continue unless you choose to cancel or change it. Sustainers--for the price of latte or cappuccino--are crucial to providing an ongoing base of community support that we can rely on. **Join us today!**

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